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Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī's Treatise on Wiping over Socks and the Rise of a Distinct Salafi Method

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Abstract

'Modern' Salafis of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century have much more in common with contemporary 'puritan' Salafis than claimed in recent scholarship. Indicative of this is the debate over whether it is allowed to wipe over socks during ritual ablutions (*wuḍū'*), a visual identity marker for Salafis. This is a recurrent theme in contemporary polemics between the four Sunni *madhabs* and the *lā-madhhabīyya* current associated with Salafis. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī's (1866–1914) treatise *al-Mash' alā al-jawrabayn* is a late Ottoman 'modern' Salafi forerunner of this debate. By placing this work in its historical context, this article demonstrates how al-Qāsimī used the issue to address fundamental questions of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* methodology in the heated debate over *ijtihād*. Later Salafi editions with introductions and comments of Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (1892–1958) and Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (1914–99), show how his method influenced later 'puritan' Salafi scholars.

Keywords

ḥadīth methodology – *risāla* literature – Salafi Islam – Salafism – Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī – Aḥmad Shākir – Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī – ritual purity – *wuḍū'* – *maṣḥ* – *jawrabayn* – *khuffayn*

Introduction

Discussions on whether it is allowed to wipe over socks (*jawrabayn*) while performing ritual ablutions (*wuḍū'*) – not to be confused with the controversy over wiping over shoes (*khuffayn*) – rather than washing the feet completely, may

seem a trivial matter of ritual purity to historians of Islamic law, pertaining to the branches (*furūʿ*) of *fiqh*.¹ However, over the course of the twentieth century, Islamic legal scholars have insisted that one's ritual purity, and hence the validity of one's ritual prayers – a central pillar of Islam – depends on correctly answering this issue.² Accordingly, in the view of these scholars, the matter was not a trivial one, but was deemed pivotal for daily ritual practice. Muslim scholars have written several treatises on whether it is allowed to wipe over socks in *wuḍūʿ*, and it remains a contentious topic until today.³ This issue of wiping over socks has come to signify a symbolic battle among Sunni scholars over the correct use of *uṣūl al-fiqh* to derive legal rulings from source texts, as well as the correct application of *ḥadīth* criticism.

There are two camps in this debate: Salafi proponents of *ijtihād* who claim to base themselves directly on the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet – instead of schools of law (*madhāhib*) – and proponents of *taqlīd*, who follow the traditional schools of law.⁴ Wiping over one's socks during ritual ablutions became a visual identity marker for Salafis. They have come to use this practice to distinguish themselves from followers of the traditional schools of law, which forbid this practice with consensus.⁵ It constitutes a “practice of piety,”

- 1 In the formative period of Islam, Sunnis distinguished themselves from Shi'is by wiping over shoes (*khuffayn*) during ritual ablutions. The subject was even included as a creedal point in treatises on Sunni belief. Gautier H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 467–68; Maher Jarrar and Sebastian Günther, *Doctrinal Instruction in Early Islam: The Book of the Explanation of the Sunna by Ghulām Khalīl* (d. 275/888) (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 86–87; Charles Pellat, “al-Mashʿ alā ʿl-Khuffayn”, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, consulted online on 26 May 2021 http://dx.doi.org.vu-nl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5001.
- 2 The debate among Muslim scholars on nail polish is a similar case of ritual purity significant for Salafi legal culture and methodology. See Abdul-Rahman Mustafa, “Ritual and Rationality in Islam: A Case Study on Nail Polish”, *ILS* 27:3 (2020), 240–84.
- 3 For a recent work against wiping over socks that polemicizes against “those who pretend to follow the *salaf*”, see Niḍāl b. Ibrāhīm Āl Rashshī, *al-Ḥaqq al-ḥaqīq fī ḥukm al-mashʿ alā al-jawrab al-raḥīq* (Damascus: Dār al-Bayrūtī, 2009). See also Ze'ev Maghen, “Much Ado about *Wuḍūʿ*”, *Der Islam* 76 (1999), 205–52; Mustafa, “Ritual and Rationality”, 281–82.
- 4 On the larger ideological framework of similar debates between these two camps see Emad Hamdeh, *Salafism and Traditionalism: Scholarly Authority in Modern Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).
- 5 In the nineteenth century, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān (d. 1307/1890), whose works inspired al-Qāsimī, discussed visual and audial aspects of ritual to distinguish the Indian Ahl-i Ḥadīth from Deobandis, such as the proper method to raise and fold one's hands in prayer, and whether ‘Amen’ should be recited out loud or silently. These practices would later become important ritual markers for ‘puritan’ Salafis, largely due to the influence of al-Albānī's treatise on prayer. See Claudia Preckel, “Islamische Bildungsnetzwerke und Gelehrtenkultur im Indien des 19. Jahrhunderts: Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Ḥān” (PhD Dissertation, Ruhr-Universität Bochum,

comparable to the typical Salafi beard style, a distinct social practice as “a technique of identity formation, boundary maintenance and social challenge.”⁶ Therefore, an analysis of Salafi treatises on this issue may help us to understand the history and dynamics of Salafi Islam in the twentieth century.⁷

Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1866–1914), a reform-minded scholar from Damascus who fiercely criticized the culture of *madhāhib* in his age and called for *ijtihād* based on the Qurʾān and Sunna unmediated by later tradition, wrote a treatise

2005), 343–47; Jacob Olidort, “In Defense of Tradition: Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī and the Salafi Method” (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2016), Ch. 5.

- 6 Aaron Rock-Singer, “Practices of Piety: An Alternative Approach to the Study of Islamic Movements”, *Religions* 11 (2020), (doi:10.3390/rel1100520). On Salafi beards as visual identity markers, see idem, “Leading with a Fist: A History of the Salafi Beard in the 20th-Century Middle East”, *IJIS* 27 (2020), 83–110. See also Philipp Bruckmayr and Jan-Peter Hartung, “Introduction: Challenges from ‘The Periphery’? Salafi Islam Outside the Arab World. Spotlights on Wider Asia”, *WI* 60:2–3 (2020), 147–48.
- 7 Bruckmayr and Hartung have recently stressed the importance of grammatical strictness and conceptual consistency in applying the labels “Salafi” and “Salafism”. They propose to couple “Salafi” to “Salafi Islam” and “Salafist” to “Salafism”, to strictly distinguish between strands aiming merely at individual religious purity (“Salafi Islam”) and politically infused forms (“Salafism”). Although this distinction may ultimately raise the same problem as the usage of ‘quietist’ that they criticize one paragraph further, the point of using Salafi Islam instead of Salafism for the general current is quite convincing. It will be adopted in this article as much as possible. Bruckmayr and Hartung, “Salafi Islam Outside the Arab World”, 145–59. See also Ondřej Beránek and Pavel Tupek, *The Temptation of Graves in Salafi Islam: Iconoclasm, Destruction and Idolatry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 8–14. To avoid misunderstandings, it has to be emphasized that, although this article at points is in critical dialogue with recent discussions on the conceptual history of *salafiyya* as well as its value as an analytical concept, mainly the much-discussed intervention of Lauzière, it ultimately does not wish to contribute to the discussion on the analytical concept of *salafiyya* itself or its classifications. It limits itself to relational genealogies and methodological continuities between authors in different time periods who more or less self-defined as *salafī*. For the discussion on the (history of the) concept itself and how to categorize different Salafi strands see Henri Lauzière, “The Construction of Salafiyya: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History”, *IJMES* 42 (2010), 369–89; Behnam T. Said and Hazim Fouad, “Introduction”, in *Salafismus: Auf der Suche nach dem wahren Islam*, ed. Behnam T. Said and Hazim Fouad (Freiburg: Herder, 2014), 28–33; Justyna Nedza, “Salafismus: Überlegungen zur Schärfung einer Analysekatgorie”, in *Salafismus*, ed. Said and Fouad, 80–105; Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Frank Griffel, “What Do We Mean by ‘Salafi’? Connecting Muhammad ‘Abduh with Egypt’s Nūr Party in Islam’s Contemporary Intellectual History”, *WI* 55:2 (2015), 186–220; Itzchack Weismann, “New and Old Perspectives in the Study of Salafism”, *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review* 81 (2017), 22–37; Joas Wagemakers, “Salafism’s Historical Continuity: The Reception of ‘Modernist’ Salafis by ‘Purist’ Salafis in Jordan”, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 30:2 (2019), 205–09; Henri Lauzière, “Salafism against Hadith Literature: The Curious Beginnings of a New Category in 1920s Algeria”, *JAOS* 141:2 (2021), 403–26.

on wiping over socks, *Kitāb al-mash' alā al-jawrabayn*. Through an analysis of this treatise and its later editions by Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (1892–1958) and Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (1914–99), this article seeks to contribute to the discussion on whether “nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reformist thinkers and scholars [can] plausibly be labelled ‘Salafi’ and, if so, what is their connection to the self-processed Salafis we hear so much about today?”⁸

Two main arguments are posited. First, al-Qāsimī initially called for *ijtihād* out of utilitarian concerns, but his method had deeper repercussions for his approach to *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*.⁹ Some authors have described Islamic reform as a utilitarian project to revise the realm of civil transactions (*mu‘āmalāt*).¹⁰ However, al-Qāsimī addressed issues of ritual (*‘ibādāt*) and called for a revision of jurisprudence through a rigorous re-application of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *ḥadīth* criticism to primary source texts. Under the banner of a method that he distinguished as *salafī*, he dismissed the postclassical *madhhab* tradition as too rigid, riddled with significant errors, and an unnecessary source of division and political opportunism, from which scholars should emancipate themselves through *ijtihād*. His method entailed an attack not only on the legacy of the postclassical *madhhab* tradition; he also wanted to revive the field of criticism of *ḥadīth* transmitters, the subdiscipline of so-called ‘impugning and approving’ (*al-jarḥ wa-l-ta’dīl*).

Second, al-Qāsimī’s focus on ritual and his radical reinterpretation and reevaluation of source texts connects early twentieth-century reform scholars – sometimes but not always self-defining as ‘Salafi’ – to later twentieth-century ‘puritan’ Salafi scholars. There is a direct line of methodological and thematic influence from al-Qāsimī, who understood his approach to *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* as ‘Salafi’, to Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir and Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, whose *ijtihād* in the fields of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* depended upon al-Qāsimī’s legacy. Moreover, these scholars are diachronically connected through their social networks. Due to its implications in the field of *fiqh* and its *uṣūl* as well as in *ḥadīth*, the initial utilitarian approach of al-Qāsimī to the issue of wiping over socks became a visual marker for later ‘puritan’ Salafis vis-à-vis followers of *madhāhib*.¹¹ A distinguishable approach to creed, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* that self-consciously labeled

8 Wagemakers, “Salafism’s Historical Continuity”, 205.

9 See al-Qāsimī’s *fatwā* on the use of the telegraph for confirming the onset of Ramadan. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Irshād al-khalq ilā al-‘amal bi-khabar al-barq* (Damascus: Maṭba‘at al-Muqtabas, 1329/1911). For a translation, see Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 181–87.

10 Wael Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunnī uṣūl al-fiqh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 214–32.

11 On other Salafi visual markers, see Rock-Singer, “Leading with a Fist”.

itself as *salafī* – but did not yet use the noun *salafīyya* – had thus already taken shape in Damascus before the 1920s.¹² The adoption of the term *salafī* for a ‘puritan’ approach to *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* later in the twentieth century by the likes of al-Albānī may be understood as the popularization and dissemination of that local phenomenon in Damascus.¹³

al-Qāsimī's Treatise: *al-Mash' alā al-jawrabayn*

al-Qāsimī's students published his *Kitāb al-mash' alā al-jawrabayn* shortly after he died of typhus in 1914.¹⁴ The authoring of this treatise on wiping over socks spelled problems for al-Qāsimī. In his correspondence with his friend and fellow book lover in Jeddah Muḥammad Naṣīf (1885–1971) in 1913, al-Qāsimī relates how he asked a friend in Medina to copy an excerpt from Abū Muḥammad 'Alī Ibn Ḥazm's (d. 456/1064) *al-Muḥallā bi-l-athār* on the subject from a manuscript there.¹⁵ However, it was no longer available in the library of Medina. The governor had ordered it to be removed from the library, “because the Wahhābīs transmit things from it that go against the common understanding.”¹⁶ Earlier, al-Qāsimī had already sent Naṣīf a draft treatise on the subject. al-Qāsimī was not satisfied with the content after further inspection, however, and performed a significant revision thereupon. By letter, al-Qāsimī asked Naṣīf to burn what he had sent earlier and to never attribute this earlier version to him.¹⁷

12 Lauzière claims the first usage of *salafīyya* only appears as late as 1925 in the context of Algeria. Lauzière, “Salafism against Hadith Literature”, 406–10.

13 Issam Eido has also noted how the “portents” (*irḥāṣāt*) of the *ḥadīth* methodology typical for Salafis should be sought in Damascus. 'Iṣṣām 'Īdū, “Ṣiyāgha musta'nifa li-'ilm al-ḥadīth”, in *al-Dars al-ḥadīthī al-mu'āṣir*, ed. Aḥmad al-Jābirī (Beirut: Markaz Namā' li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt, 2017), 385–90.

14 His students attached another treatise authored by al-Qāsimī to it with his equally controversial opinions on divorce, *al-Istī'nās fī taṣḥīḥ ankiḥat al-nās*. This treatise contains some other controversial viewpoints that would become typical for Salafis throughout the twentieth century, such as the invalidity of triple divorce uttered at once. This issue was important for Shākir and al-Albānī, as well as the Indian Ahl-i Ḥadīth. See Preckel, “Islamische Bildungsnetzwerke”, 353–58; Samy Ayoub, “Casting Off Egyptian Ḥanafism: *Sharī'a*, Divorce, and Legal Reform in 20th-Century Egypt”, *WT* 60:4 (2020), 1–35.

15 On Muḥammad Naṣīf see Ulrike Freitag, “Scholarly Exchange and Trade: Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf and His Letters to Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje”, in *The Piety of Learning: Islamic Studies in Honor of Stefan Reichmuth*, ed. Michael Kemper and Ralf Elger (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 292–308.

16 Zāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-'aṣruhu* (Damascus: al-Maṭba'a al-Hāshimiyya, 1965), 627.

17 Ibid., 486.

The content of the booklet itself *prima facie* does not merit particular attention. It mainly consists of a series of prophetic traditions that seem to legitimize wiping over socks, and some legal reflections thereon. But, upon closer reading, one realizes how al-Qāsimī's evaluation of the reliability of *ḥadīth* literature on the issue, as well as his legal reasoning, deviated significantly from the conventions of his age. It may even be interpreted as part of a series of counterattacks in an enduring, highly politicized conflict with the dominant class of Muslim scholars, patronized by the Ottoman authorities during his time in Damascus. These were mainly aligned with the Ḥanafī school. In this conflict, a break with the 'textual polity' of later works of the schools of law played a major part.¹⁸ The claim of *ijtihād* based on a direct return to primary source texts was the key element. Earlier, al-Qāsimī had already published a series of small works on *uṣūl al-fiqh* that perturbed the religious scene of Damascus, prompting the intervention of the Ottoman authorities.¹⁹

In light of that ongoing conflict, al-Qāsimī's *Mash' alā al-jawrabayn* demonstrates that wiping over socks, first and foremost, represented a symbolic battle for him. Although ritual purity was a real concern, the work primarily served him in addressing fundamental points on the application of legal thought and *ḥadīth* methodology. al-Qāsimī considered his contemporaries not only unjustifiably rigid on this particular matter, but also outright errant due to their emulation (*taqlid*) of what – according to him – were obvious mistakes on the part of their predecessors within their schools of law.

A Utilitarian Treatise?

The structure of the treatise is as follows: (1) the reason for its composition; (2) an argument that wiping over socks was known to the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*), Successors (*tābiʿīn*), early grand scholars (*aʿimma*) as well as to the narrators of *ḥadīth*; (3) discussion of a related issue of *uṣūl al-fiqh*; (4) an inventory of *ḥadīth* material on the issue; (5) discussion of an issue of *uṣūl al-fiqh* that stresses the ultimate authority of the Companions; (6) an inventory of sayings of the Successors and the schools of law on the issue; and (7) an argument on facilitation in matters of *fiqh*.

18 Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1, 5, 38, 118, 251–52.

19 On these earlier publications and their impact on the social relations between the scholars of Damascus see Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 177–79; Pieter Coppens, "A Silent *uṣūl* Revolution? al-Qāsimī, *ijtihād*, and the Fundamentals of *tafsīr*", *MIDEO* 36 (2021), 21–61.

In the introduction (1), al-Qāsimī explains what motivated him to write it. He relates how school teachers complained to him that washing the feet during the performing of ritual ablutions caused serious problems for school children in cold winters. Many of them abandoned prayers as a result, or were beset with health problems, such as swollen feet, damage to the skin, and ulceration. al-Qāsimī also says to have received questions from people traveling by ship who did not know how to perform ritual ablutions while in the open sea. He concludes that this leads many to leave ritual prayer, and thus legitimizes a more flexible approach to *fiqh* than offered by representatives of the traditional schools of law.²⁰

One may suggest that al-Qāsimī overstated the practical importance of this issue to use it as an instrument for making some broader points on *fiqh* and its *uṣūl*, as well as on *ḥadīth* methodology. It was not a novel question, after all, because of a drastic change in circumstances due to the advance of Western modernity or new consumer goods available on the market, as Islamic reform is sometimes characterized. Socks had been available for centuries, and it did not require revolutionary insight to concede the fact that Damascene winters were cold. Although these complaints offered him a good opportunity to fight a symbolic battle with the dominant *madhhab*-bound scholarly elite, it remains too cynical an interpretation to assume that this was his only motivation. Making the performance of religious obligations easier for people by mitigating hardships was a genuine concern of al-Qāsimī. It made sense to discuss ritual purity in that light, since it was something people were dealing with more than once daily.²¹ He realized very well that for segments of Ottoman society during his age, a lifestyle detached from Islam's rituals and legal and social norms had become a serious option. By facilitating adherence to Islam, he hoped to keep people attached to Islam's daily practices. A review in the Damascene reform-oriented journal *al-Muqtabas* also interpreted the objective of his work as such. The journal describes the treatise as "similar to his other writings in rectifying (*taḥqīq*) and looking further, as well as understanding the deeper meanings of the *Sharī'a*, and bringing those who rebel against it closer thereto and back within its realm."²² Other notes from his hand on the

20 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Kitāb al-maṣḥ 'alā al-jawrabayn*, ed. Qāsim Khayr al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Taraqqī, 1332/1914), 2–3.

21 Abdul-Rahman Mustafa has shown that taking away hardship in matters of ritual purity is a common trend in Islamic legal discussions from the formative period of Islam onwards. Mustafa, "Ritual and Rationality", 262–66.

22 Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, "Makhṭūṭāt wa-maṭbū'āt: Kitāb al-maṣḥ 'alā al-jawrabayn", *al-Muqtabas* 8:8 (1332/1914), 627.

concept of *maṣlaḥa* and the importance of one unitarian and flexible approach to *fiqh* confirm this concern of al-Qāsimī.²³

In light of the above, can one classify the approach of al-Qāsimī in this work as typical for the ‘utilitarian’ approach to *fiqh* that is often associated with this strand of reform?²⁴ Its content indicates a more complicated picture. The motives of al-Qāsimī may have been utilitarian, but still, a systematic methodology of scrutinizing *ḥadīth* material and serious juridical deliberation lies at the basis of it. This approach would not give legitimacy to any standpoint that al-Qāsimī deemed in the benefit of Muslims at that time. So, it amounts to more than “Laissez-Faire Islam,” or “lip service to Islamic values” through a drastic manipulation of the concept of *maṣlaḥa*.²⁵ Furthermore, al-Qāsimī ultimately does not only allow the practice as a temporary concession (*rukḥṣa*) in the case of hardship, as one would expect of a utilitarian approach. After a reevaluation of the primary sources, he claims that it is allowed in all circumstances. Later representatives of the schools of law, he claims, have simply collectively erred on the issue due to a misevaluation of the reliability of prophetic narrations. Here, there is an inclination towards purification of the legal tradition from errors that surpasses a mere utilitarian approach.

The following part (2) is a short argument claiming that the Qur’an should be the basis of all Islamic rulings. al-Qāsimī wants to show how the issue of wiping over socks can be traced back to the Qur’an, either specifically from a variant reading of the ablution verse, Q 5:6, or –if one does not accept that optional reading – generally from the concept of the Sunna rooted in several Qur’anic verses. On the part of Q 5:6 dealing with washing the feet during ablutions, “Wash your faces and hands until the elbows, and wipe over your

23 See Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *al-Sawānīḥ*, ed. Sāmī al-Azhar al-Farīdī (Damascus: Dār al-Ṭayba, 2020), 28, 29, 76. See also similar *fatāwā* in *al-Manār*, which confirm that relieving people’s hardship initially was a major concern to discuss this issue. Riḍā even claims that many people told him that they returned to ritual prayer because of his *fatwā* on the matter. Upon appearance of the *risāla*, he praised al-Qāsimī in the review in *al-Manār* for having been more thorough in his discussion and surpassing his earlier treatment of the subject (in his discussion of *wuḍūʾ* in his Qur’an commentary and in a *fatwā*). [Author unknown], “Taqrīz al-maṭbūʿāt”, *al-Manār* 18 (1915), 317; Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, “al-Maṣḥ ‘alā al-khuff al-muqaṭṭa’ wa-l-jawārib”, *al-Manār* 23 (1922), 497; idem, “al-Maṣḥ ‘alā al-jawārib”, *al-Manār* 31 (1930), 444, idem, *Tafsīr al-qurʾān al-ḥakīm al-shahīr bi-Tafsīr al-Manār* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1993), 6: 239–42.

24 Hallaq, *History of Islamic Legal Theories*, 214–32; Felicitas Opwis, “Maṣlaḥa in Contemporary Islamic Legal Theory”, *ILS* 12:2 (2005), 182–223.

25 Leor Halevi, *Modern Things on Trial: Islam’s Global and Material Reformation in the Age of Rida, 1865–1935* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 20, 23–25; Hallaq, *History of Islamic Legal Theories*, 214, 231, 254.

heads, and your feet" (*wa'msaḥū bi-ru'ūsikum wa-arjulakum*), al-Qāsimī points out that there is a variant that reads *arjulikum*. The majority of Companions is said to have read *arjulakum*, in *naṣb*, which connects it to *fa'ghsilū* earlier in the verse. Then, the meaning is that the feet should be washed entirely. The apparent meaning of the verse when read *arjulikum*, in *jarr*, which connects it to *amsaḥū bi-*, is that only wiping over the feet is obligatory. This reading and explanation are confirmed only by a minority of Companions, but al-Qāsimī holds that the maxim of taking away hardship (*raf' al-ḥaraj*) legitimizes the preference of this particular variant reading.²⁶ Still, if one wishes to follow the majority opinion that it should be understood as washing the feet, then other verses in the Qur'an that oblige believers to obey and follow the Prophet still legitimize the practice from a Qur'anic perspective, since al-Qāsimī is convinced that the Prophet indeed did it himself.²⁷

Classifying Interrupted (munqaṭi') and Anomalous (shādhdh) Narrations

al-Qāsimī's focus in the next part (3) is proving that the Prophet himself wiped over his socks during ritual ablutions, or at least permitted this practice. This part is telling for al-Qāsimī's method in *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *ḥadīth* analysis, as well as for his approach to independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). It is well-established that al-Qāsimī tried to bring about a revival of *uṣūl* in both *fiqh* and *tafsīr*. He did not so much come up with new inventions within these knowledge disciplines, but rather brought largely forgotten concepts and texts back into the limelight through his retrieval and publication of forgotten manuscripts, as well as his writings and lessons.²⁸ This part of the treatise indicates that he had the same goal for the discipline of *ḥadīth* studies.

al-Qāsimī distinguishes between direct and indirect evidence for the legitimacy of the practice, and mentions several prophetic narrations of both kinds of evidence. He treats five common points of criticism on these narrations and debunks them one by one. The first point is on the chain of transmission (*sanad*) of a *ḥadīth* attributed to al-Thawbān (d. 54/673–74) that justifies wiping over socks. Two transmitters, who lived in the same age, supposedly had not directly heard narrations from each other, while their intermediary is not mentioned. Therefore, *ḥadīth* scholars have classified the chain of narration as 'defective by an interruption' (*mu'allal bi-l-inqīṭā'*).²⁹ al-Qāsimī finds this too

26 al-Qāsimī, *Kitāb al-maṣh*, 4–5, 17.

27 Ibid., 4–5.

28 See Coppens, "Silent *uṣūl* Revolution"; El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 177–79.

29 On the categories of defective and interrupted *ḥadīth* and the differences of opinion on them see Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *An Introduction to the Science of Ḥadīth: Kitāb Ma'rīfat*

strict a criterion to be used for judging the trustworthiness of the narration. Imam Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 261/875) was more lenient, he explains. The latter stated that the mere possibility of having met each other suffices, and that having directly heard *ḥadīth* from each other does not need to be confirmed. For this reason, al-Qāsimī claims, grand *ḥadīth* collectors like Imam Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and Imam Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/889) included the *ḥadīth* in their collections without further comments – a proof in and of itself that such *ḥadīth* may be used as legal evidence. al-Qāsimī contends that, since the narration does not contain obvious defects, it should be classified as good (*ḥasan*) at least, which equals sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) as a legal text.³⁰

The second point of criticism deals with a matter of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Critics say that al-Thawbān's *ḥadīth* cannot be used to legitimize the practice of wiping over socks as a general rule, because it specifically deals with a situation of extreme cold. al-Qāsimī responds to this with the rule in *uṣūl al-fiqh* that "a general statement related for a specific reason is treated as a general statement, and is not made specific to the cause of its narration" (*al-lafẓ al-āmm al-wārid 'alā sabab khāṣṣ yuḥmalu 'alā 'umūmihi wa-lā yukhaṣṣu bi-l-sabab al-ladhī warada fīhi*). The statement of the Prophet in the mentioned *ḥadīth* can clearly be understood in isolation of the specific matter, he maintains, so it should be considered a general ruling.³¹

The third point of criticism deals with the reliability of another *ḥadīth* on the subject of wiping over socks. A couple of *ḥadīth* critics consider the *ḥadīth* attributed to al-Mughīra b. Shu'ba (d. 50/600) on the same subject to be anomalous (*shādhidh*), and therefore weak (*ḍa'īf*).³² al-Qāsimī refutes the point that it is weak by an argument from authority (*argumentum ad verecundiam*): if an esteemed authority such as Muḥammad b. 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) considered the *ḥadīth* as sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*), it follows that the opinions of lesser scholars no longer matter. al-Qāsimī further points out that anomaly (*shudhūd*) does not by definition equal weakness. He mentions the differences of opinion on the meaning of anomaly, and that *ḥadīth* scholars do not definitively and unanimously consider an anomalous chain of transmission defective. The type of anomaly under which this narration is categorized is 'the inconsistency of one of its narrators' (*mukhālafat aḥad ruwātihi*). Quoting Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), al-Qāsimī

anwā' 'ilm al-ḥadīth, trans. Eerik Dickinson (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2006), 43–44, 67–69.

30 al-Qāsimī, *Kitāb al-maṣh*, 7–8.

31 Ibid., 8–9.

32 See Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Science of Ḥadīth*, 57–58.

argues that this classification is generally not considered as grounds for declaring a narration weak; it may even turn out to be the soundest narration available. al-Qāsimī refers to his book on the life and legacy of Imam Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), where he explains in greater detail how the criteria of investigating the soundness of a narration depended on the individual insight of the early *ḥadīth* critics (*ijtihād al-mujtahidīn*), and thus may differ significantly in strictness. In this case, al-Qāsimī clearly and consciously opts for a more lenient approach to be able to justify his legal opinion; as in the case of the variant Qurʾanic reading earlier, here again, a utilitarian consideration determines his methodological choices.³³

The fourth point of contention is the longest. Referring to the principle of *ijtihād* and the necessity of undertaking an honest investigation to establish the strongest view, al-Qāsimī does not hesitate to challenge the judgment of a practically undisputed authority such as al-Nawawī on this issue. al-Nawawī criticizes the *ḥadīth* of al-Mughīra for two reasons. On the one hand, he classifies the narration as weak, referring to earlier grand scholars. On the other hand, al-Nawawī states that – in the case of those who do not choose to consider the narration as weak – it would not be a general ruling but only valid under specific circumstances. al-Nawawī reinterprets the narration to mean that one can only wipe over a foot cover that one can continuously walk on without damaging it (*mutābaʿat al-mashy ʿalayhi*). Thus, states al-Nawawī, the *ḥadīth* alludes to socks within sandals. On this point of reinterpretation, al-Qāsimī's response is short. He considers this as proof that only an emulator (*muqallid*) would be content with, but which is unacceptable to scholars of *ḥadīth* or *uṣūl al-fiqh*, who only accept arguments based on the Qurʾān, the Sunna and other proofs derived therefrom, and not on baseless opinion. He states that other texts from the Qurʾān and the Sunna further confirm rather than refute the *ḥadīth*. al-Qāsimī debunks al-Nawawī's claim that a general ruling cannot be distilled from the narration, by evoking a difference of opinion in *uṣūl al-fiqh* on the general character of a shared meaning (*ʿumūm al-mushtarak*) and the general character of the conditions of the statement (*ʿumūm ḥālat al-waḍʿ*). al-Nawawī and the interpreters of his position on the issue reject these concepts, while al-Qāsimī accepts them.³⁴

al-Qāsimī reserves more space in his treatise for tackling the point of al-Nawawī declaring the narration as weak. He vehemently disagrees with al-Nawawī's judgment. Instead, al-Qāsimī argues that the narration is sound,

33 al-Qāsimī, *Kitāb al-mash*, 11–13; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Ḥayāt al-Bukhārī*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Arnāʾūṭ (Beirut: Dār al-nafāʾis, 1992), 11–12.

34 al-Qāsimī, *Kitāb al-mash*, 13–14, 17–21.

both from the perspective of criticism of the chain of transmission (*isnād*), as well as of criticism of the content (*matn*).³⁵ Where just earlier he himself invoked an *argumentum ad verecundiam*, somewhat inconsistently, he now refutes such an argument applied by al-Nawawī. He is not impressed by al-Nawawī's argument that al-Tirmidhī's classification of the narration as sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) is overruled by a majority of other *ḥadīth* scholars who classify it as weak. al-Nawawī considers all of them grander authorities individually than al-Tirmidhī, let alone as a collective. al-Qāsimī claims that the underlying principle and process of authentication matters more than the number of scholars in favor of or opposed to the soundness of the narration. After all, scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh* consider a single narration (*khabar aḥad*) a valid proof to be acted upon, he argues, and this case is no different; a minority report may even be the most reliable proof available. The establishment of a majority does not constitute a definitive proof (*ḥujja*), only a consensus (*ijmā'*) among scholars does. Above that, he concedes, the scholars al-Nawawī mentions in opposition to al-Tirmidhī all declared the narration weak based on the anomaly (*shudhūd*) in the chain of transmission. al-Qāsimī refers to his earlier discussion in the treatise on why he disagrees with that judgment.³⁶

As for the content of the narration, al-Qāsimī states that the soundness of the *ḥadīth* is further supported by the circumstantial evidence of a score of Companions and Successors who consciously implemented the content of the narration, as well as *Mujtahid* Imams such as Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, and Abū Dāwūd, who all accepted the *ḥadīth* in question. The principle in *ḥadīth* methodology of 'sound through an external factor' (*al-ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrihi*) dictates that, if these people of high status from the first generations considered this narration to be sound and implemented it, then the *ḥadīth* should be classified as such, even if it does not have a sound chain of transmission. This also explains why al-Bukhārī and Muslim did not include the narration in their later canonized works according to al-Qāsimī. He does not frame this as an attack on the reliability of these works, quite the contrary. Their approach was so extremely vigilant and meticulous that they still left out a lot of material that was actually sound, he argues. They only incorporated narrations that are 'sound in itself' (*al-ṣaḥīḥ li-dhātihī*), but recognized that they excluded a lot of sound material due to focusing solely on the chain of transmission. Therefore, al-Qāsimī pleads for a reverse *matn* criticism: wherever it is possible to refute narrations based on critical scrutiny of their *matn* in comparison with circumstantial evidence (*radd al-khabar*

³⁵ Ibid., 17.

³⁶ Ibid., 14–17.

bi-l-istidlāl), declaring them as sound should also be possible (*qabūl al-akhbār bi-l-istidlāl*). He holds this approach only suitable for scholars deeply rooted in knowledge of the fundamentals, branches, and deeper meanings of this religion. The circumstantial evidence that supports the soundness of the narration is abundant according to al-Qāsimī, from the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the acts of the Companions.³⁷

The fifth point of contention once again deals with an issue of reliability of a *ḥadīth* on the subject, this one attributed to Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (d. ca. 44/672). As was the case with the narration attributed to al-Thawbān, it is generally argued that it is weak because it is interrupted (*munqaṭi'*), and because one of the narrators is considered weak. On the aspect of interruption (*inqiṭā'*), al-Qāsimī repeats his earlier statement that there is a difference of opinion on whether an absolute confirmation that a narrator directly heard a narration from someone else is really necessary. He further points out that there is no consensus on the *ḥadīth*'s weakness, and that several scholars declared it to be a strong tradition. al-Qāsimī prefers an epistemology of trust in this matter. He propagates the principle that, in cases of doubt, declaring a narrator trustworthy (*al-ta'dīl*) takes precedence over 'injuring' him/her (*al-jarḥ*), i.e. declaring him/her unreliable. He explains that the *ḥadīth* is further supported by the similarity of the content with those attributed to al-Mughīra and al-Thawbān, which makes it 'good through an external factor' (*ḥasan li-ghayrihi*). al-Qāsimī concludes this discussion with an *uṣūl* statement that he derives from Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī's (d. 771/1370) *Jam' al-jawāmi'*, that

if a *ḥadīth* in which a defect is detected (*al-ḥadīth al-mu'allal*) is supported by a weak *ḥadīth*, a saying or an act of a Companion, the saying of a majority of the scholars, an analogy (*qiyās*), the *ḥadīth*'s circulation without disapproval, or the corresponding acts of the people of the era, all the aforementioned constitutes a conclusive proof (*ḥujja*), because the gathering of two weak things makes a strong thing that limits doubt.³⁸

After a semantic discussion of the word *jawrab*, through which al-Qāsimī wants to show that it refers – in essence – to a sock made specifically from textile, he delves deeply into a point concerning *uṣūl al-fiqh*. This point in question is at the heart of al-Qāsimī's specific 'Salafi' approach to *fiqh*, and his attack on the dominance of the traditional schools of law. He laments people who do not pay attention to the school (*madhhab*) of a Companion of the Prophet

³⁷ Ibid., 14–16.

³⁸ Ibid., 21–23.

when it is mentioned to them, because they believe it is not necessary to implement it. Worse still, he finds people who attack such a position attributed to a Companion because that position is not held by the school they follow. Therefore, al-Qāsimī takes five full pages to prove that the sayings and legal opinions (*fatāwā*) of the Companions – whom mainstream Sunni doctrine considers the loftiest people in both knowledge and practice – take precedence over any other later legal opinion.³⁹ If anyone among the scholars would be deserving of emulation (*taqlid*), he contends, it would be the Companions, as stated by several scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, like al-Subkī in *Jamʿ al-jawāmīʿ*. The assertion that no specific school is recorded as deriving from them is false, according to al-Qāsimī. The voluminous collections of *ḥadīth* – that are abundantly available without textual corruption in libraries worldwide – are all testament to their specific school, especially the sayings therein with chains of transmission that classify as halted (*mawqūf*) at the Companions or as raised (*marfūʿ*) through them to the Prophet. This genre of literature is even much better and more meticulously preserved, al-Qāsimī claims, than any other *fiqh* literature of the later schools of law, the copies of which are often corrupted. If the followers of these postclassical schools care so much about the sayings of their Imams, he rhetorically asks, then why did they not put more effort into preserving these sayings just as meticulously?

al-Qāsimī cites as an example how he searched in vain the libraries of the entire Levant for a manuscript of *al-Risāla*, the famous and fundamental work of al-Shāfiʿī on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, to compare it to the printed edition that was only first published in 1895.⁴⁰ Consequently, how can anyone, he argues, claim that it is better to emulate these later schools of law while the works of the Sunna of the Prophet are far better preserved in all libraries in the entire Islamic world? These are still widely read, copied, and corrected with a chain of transmission (*ijāza*). A lot of scholars have even claimed, he states, that they are so trustworthy that one can implement their rulings and use them as evidence, even if one has not heard these works from a specialist with a chain of transmission (*sanad*).⁴¹ With this last argument, al-Qāsimī opens the door to free

39 Ibid., 26–31.

40 On manuscripts and prints of *al-Risāla* see El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 115n89, 232–34.

41 This does not imply that al-Qāsimī considered the practice of hearing *ḥadīth* to receive a license (*ijāza*) outdated or redundant. al-Qāsimī was very active in this field from a young age, and remained so after his turn to Salafi ideas. He documented the *ijāzas* he received and gave with much care, among which his *ijāza* to Aḥmad Shākir, in which he emphasized the importance of maintaining this tradition in the modern age. al-ʿAjmī, *Imām al-Shām*, 105–228, 301–354; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Riḥlati ilā l-Madīna al-munawwara*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-ʿAjmī (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 2008), 94–5; Garrett Davidson, *Carrying*

oneself from the dominant textual polity in which *ijtihād* was ruled out with the argument that no one would have the ability to read the full scale of available *ḥadīth* works with an *ijāza*. The books are available and completely reliable, he states, so one can directly consult them. Indeed, someone like Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī would do so after al-Qāsimī's lifetime, and would be criticized for engaging with these works of *ḥadīth* without possessing a single *ijāza* in them. "Understand, therefore, and do not be a prisoner of emulation (*taqlīd*)," al-Qāsimī ends this section with.⁴²

With this part, the core of his argument in favor of *ijtihād* is delivered. The next sections deal with sayings of the Successors (*tābi'īn*) in favor of wiping over socks, whom he deems most worthy of emulation after the Companions for those who insist on emulation (*taqlīd*), as well as representatives of the later schools of law.⁴³ Between these sayings, al-Qāsimī repeatedly reiterates his call for *ijtihād* and his dislike of *taqlīd* in the schools of law. His main aim is to establish that the direct companions of the founders of these schools did not emulate their teachers, but were *mujtahids* in their own right. According to him, they were so not only within their particular school of law but also in an absolute sense – directly engaging with the textual evidence available to them.⁴⁴

Did al-Qāsimī Consider his Approach *salafī*, and What did that Mean to him?

This *ḥadīth*- and *uṣūl*-oriented anti-*madhhab* and pro-*ijtihād* stance of al-Qāsimī, paired with a negative appreciation of speculative theology (*kalām*), was obviously not a new phenomenon in Islamic history. It may be considered as a 'translocal' or 'polycentric' manifestation in Damascus of an approach to Islamic knowledge disciplines that has re-emerged in different times and locations with its specific local characteristics.⁴⁵ al-Qāsimī's thought and activism

on the Tradition: A Social and Intellectual History of Hadith Transmission across a Thousand Years (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 286–92.

42 al-Qāsimī, *Kitāb al-maṣh*, 27–31.

43 Ibid., 31–40.

44 Ibid., 33. See also al-Qāsimī, *Sawāniḥ*, 76–77.

45 On the concept of 'translocality', defined as "the sum of phenomena which result from a multitude of circulations and transfers", "highlighting the fact that the interactions and connections between places, institutions, actors, and concepts have far more diverse, and often even contradictory effects than is commonly assumed", see Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, "'Translocality': An Approach to Connection and Transfer in Area Studies", in

was indebted to the textual sources of such earlier authors as Muḥammad al-Shawkānī's (d. 1255/1834) thirteenth/eighteenth-century writings from Yemen, whose works were just being published and which al-Qāsimī discussed in a journal review.⁴⁶ Also Ibn Taymiyya's and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's (d. 751/1350) eighth/fourteenth-century writings, which he helped rediscover in the manuscript libraries of Damascus, influenced his approach.⁴⁷

Through treatises like this work on wiping over socks, which aimed at a larger audience than just the scholarly elite, al-Qāsimī was significantly contributing to bringing to Damascus the hermeneutical paradigm of mainly eighteenth-century Islamic scholars and their popular appeal relatively far removed from imperial centres. This paradigm was characterized by a renewed focus on *uṣūl* literature combined with primary source texts as tools for *ijtihād*, and a simplified text-based, non-rationalist perspective on creedal matters. Such scholars attracted popular appeal from the eighteenth century onwards in regions like Nigeria, India, Libya, Yemen, and the Arabian Peninsula – without, as far as we know from the textual sources, explicitly claiming the label 'Salafi' – but had not yet set foot in Damascus.⁴⁸

One may suggest to view al-Qāsimī and his circle against the backdrop of such scholars and their popular appeal, which came about before the confrontation with Europe, rather than as inspired by the anti-colonial agenda of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1314/1897) and Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849–1905). After all, the confrontation with Europe was hardly tangible in Damascus at the time. al-Qāsimī and his circle had much more urgent issues with the centralist policies of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamit II (1842–1918), and the *madhhab*- and *ṭarīqa*-bound religious class the latter patronized in Damascus.⁴⁹ Hence, the

Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective, ed. Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 5. On the "polycentricity in the origins of a distinct interpretation of Islamic normativity called *salafiyya*" see Bruckmayr and Hartung, "Salafi Islam Outside the Arab World", 140–41.

46 In his review, al-Qāsimī is full of praise for al-Shawkānī and calls it one of the blessings of his age that his work is now first published and thus spread more widely than only in Yemen. See Coppens, "Silent *uṣūl* Revolution", 33. See also Bernard Haykel and Aron Zysow, "What Makes a *Madhhab* a *Madhhab*: Zaydī Debates on the Structure of Legal Authority", *Arabica* 59 (2012), 332–71.

47 El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 177–79; Coppens, "Silent *uṣūl* Revolution", 38–40, 47–49.

48 For a detailed discussion of the religious ideas of these eighteenth-century authors and their societal impact see Ahmad S. Dallal, *Islam without Europe: Traditions of Reform in Eighteenth-Century Islamic Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

49 See David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990); Itzchack Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden, Brill, 2000); idem, "Between Šūfī

label 'Salafi,' and the methodology associated therewith, was a very suitable means of creating a sense of "self-defining action" in response to that imperial power.⁵⁰

al-Qāsimī was also indebted to synchronic developments of like-minded scholars and similar 'translocal' circles in Baghdad, Egypt, the Arabian peninsula, North Africa, and the Ahl-i Ḥadith in South Asia, with whom he either directly corresponded or was indirectly connected to through mutual acquaintances, and whose publications he owned and critically read.⁵¹ What was new and specific for Damascus, however, was that al-Qāsimī and his local circle self-consciously paired this approach with the label *salafi*.⁵² This deserves further scrutiny here.

The field of Islamic studies has recently witnessed a discussion on the exact meaning of the label 'Salafi,' its usage since the late nineteenth century,

Reformism and Modernist Rationalism: A Reappraisal of the Origins of the Salafiyya from the Damascene Angle", *WI* 41:2 (2001), 206–37; Thomas Eich, "The Forgotten Salafi: Abū-Hudā Aṣ-Ṣayyādī", *WI* 43:1 (2003), 61–87; idem, "Questioning Paradigms: A Close Reading of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Bayṭār's *Ḥilya* in Order to Gain Some New Insights into the Damascene Salafiyya", *Arabica* 52:3 (2005), 373–90; idem, "Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī: Still Such a Polarizing Figure (Response to Itzhak Weismann)", *Arabica* 53:3 (2008), 433–44; idem, "Abū l-Hudā and the Alūsīs in Scholarship on Salafism: A Note on Methodology", *WI* 49:3–4 (2009), 466–72; Coppens, "Silent *uṣūl* Revolution"; idem, "The '*Muḡtahids*' Incident" According to al-Qāsimī's Memoirs: Introduction and Translation", *MIDEO* 36 (2021), 63–97.

50 See Leila Hudson, "Late Ottoman Damascus: Investments in Public Space and the Emergence of Popular Sovereignty", *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 15:2 (2006), 153.

51 His library contained several works of Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān (d. 1307/1890), with his own extensive notes added in the margin, a proof of critical engagement with and clear influence from his works. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Badī' al-maknūn fī masā'il aḥamm al-funūn*, ed. Sāmī al-Azhar al-Farīdī (Tunis: Dār al-Māziri, 2019), 22, 24. For al-Qāsimī's letter correspondence with likeminded scholars in other countries see al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn*; Muḥammad b. Nāṣir al-'Ajmī, *al-Rasā'il al-mutabādila bayna Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 2001). For discussions of his international contexts in secondary literature see Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 21, 24–26, 32–33, 35, 42, 59; Preckel, "Islamische Bildungsnetzwerke", 229–37; Lauzière, "Salafism against Hadith Literature", 411. On the continuities of Salafi Islam with these earlier figures see Bruckmayr and Hartung, "Salafi Islam Outside the Arab World", 140.

52 It must be noted that, despite being accused of Wahhābī sympathies on several occasions, al-Qāsimī and his peers still knew precious little of the Wahhābīs and that there was hardly any direct mutual influence yet. The self-proclaimed Salafīs of this formative period – and of later periods – should certainly not be considered "derived unidirectionally from Wahhābī Islam", as rightly pointed out by Hartung and Bruckmayr recently. Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī and al-Qāsimī were still trying to find out who the Wahhābīs were exactly, as becomes clear from their letter correspondence with each other and with their acquaintances from the Hijaz. al-'Ajmī, *Rasā'il*, 104; Bruckmayr and Hartung, "Salafi Islam Outside the Arab World", 139.

and “the historical process by which various intellectuals came to shape and defend the concept of Salafism in ways that we now take for granted.”⁵³ A current theory is that the term initially only figured in reform-oriented writings in the sense of “the doctrine of the forefathers” (*madhhab al-salaf*), signifying an approach to God’s attributes, typical of (neo-)Hanbalism, that refuses to metaphorically interpret these attributes. The term *salafī* or *salafiyya*, according to this interpretation of history, was not used for the propagation of *ijtihād* based on the Qur’an and the Sunna outside the boundaries of the four *madh-habs*, and was not used as an epithet for a coherent ‘modernist’ movement before the 1920s. Contemporary ‘puritan’ Salafis should then be understood in isolation of historical ‘modern’ or ‘reformist’ Salafis such as al-Qāsimī, Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935) and Muḥammad ‘Abduh, as they follow separate genealogical trajectories.⁵⁴

However, there is concrete textual evidence that al-Qāsimī and his interlocutors considered themselves *salafī*, and that they used this epithet for a method that pertained to more than simply creed, but also included a specific approach to *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, closely intertwined with the idea of *ijtihād*. One of the instances where al-Qāsimī explicitly self-defines as *salafī* is in a line of poetry from 1897. When one reads the full poem in its context, it appears that the term *salafī* during the late 1890s pertained to more than merely creed in the local and regional context of al-Qāsimī.⁵⁵ The full poem reads as follows:

People pretend that I claim
to have my own Jamālī school (*madhhab*).

And that when I give a legal opinion
to people, I ascribe my own verdict.

No, by the everlasting existence of God,
I am a *salafī* in my conviction (*intihāl*).

My school is what is in the Book of
God, my Lord the Highest.

53 Lauzière, *Making of Salafism*, 3. For the major contributions to this discussion see above, note 7.

54 Lauzière, *Making of Salafism*, 32–33; idem, “Construction of Salafiyya”.

55 Lauzière paraphrases only one verse from the poem and serves the usage of *salafī* in it off as an idiosyncrasy. He does not mention the broader context in which al-Qāsimī originally cited it. Lauzière, *Making of Salafism*, 34–35.

Then what is sound from among
the narrations, not 'it is said' and 'he said'.

I pursue the truth and am not
content with the opinions of men.

I consider *taqlīd* as ignorance,
and blindness, in every situation.⁵⁶

al-Qāsimī cited these lines of poetry in his memoirs against the backdrop of the events of the so-called *Mujtahids'* Incident in 1897, when al-Qāsimī and his weekly reading group were arrested and interrogated by the Ottoman authorities for allegedly practicing *ijtihād*.⁵⁷ Creedal matters did not feature in any way in that incident. Rather, the issue in question related to some controversial *fiqh* viewpoints that the participants were accused of propagating, based on a reevaluation of the proof texts from the Qur'an and the Sunna. These legal opinions conflicted with the common *madhhab*-oriented understanding of the ruling religious class in those days and were politically sensitive to the Ottoman rulers. These opinions were – like the issue of wiping over socks under discussion here – ostensibly minor details in Islamic law. They nonetheless assumed a highly symbolic character, often related to ritual purity or visual aspects of social practices: the purity of wine and non-Muslims, the abandoning of the traditional turban, and the consumption of tobacco.⁵⁸ Indeed, to be a *salafī* in this context pertains to legal methodology. It implies to be engaged in *ijtihād* in matters of *fiqh*, to base oneself on the Qur'an and the sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) Sunna, instead of relying on later authorities ("not 'it is said' and 'he said'", as the poem reads), and an unequivocal denunciation of *taqlīd*. Other lines of poetry, which al-Qāsimī cites in the same passage of his memoirs, further confirm this:

I say, as have said the Imams before us,
The sound narrations of the Chosen One are my *madhhab*.

Shall I then mindfully wear the timeworn cloth of 'it is said' and 'he said'
and not adorn myself with the gilded robe (*mudhahhab*)?⁵⁹

56 For the original Arabic, see Muḥammad b. Nāṣir al-'Ajmī, *Imām al-Shām fī 'aṣrihi Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī: sirātuḥu al-dhātīyya bi-qalamihī wa-yalīhi shuyūkhuhu wa-ijāzātuhum lahu – talāmīdhuhu wa-ijāzātuhū* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 2009), 91.

57 See Coppens, "'Mujtahids' Incident".

58 For the Arabic original, see al-'Ajmī, *Imām al-Shām*, 63–95.

59 Ibid., 91.

The fact that the term *salafī* does not appear more frequently in writings before the 1920s with the specific conceptual meaning of a religious orientation is not out of the ordinary. al-Qāsimī was virtually the only active author of the Damascene Salafi circle. Apart from his writings and letter correspondence, there is hardly any paper trail indicative of what his circle was discussing. His private letter correspondence offers several indications that the term had attained a meaning pertaining to *fiqh* as well in his time, as the aforementioned poem also suggests. It further confirms that the Salafis of Damascus did indeed consider themselves connected with like-minded people in other regions. In this letter correspondence with al-Qāsimī in 1910, the Damascene Salafi Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī (d. 1856/1924) expresses his joy at the establishment of contacts between Muḥammad al-Makkī b. ‘Azūz al-Tūnisī (d. 1915) and “the Damascene Salafis” (*al-salafiyyīn al-Dimashqiyyīn*).⁶⁰ In the same letter, he mentions how a colleague embarked on the way of the *salaf* (*tamadhdhab bi-madhdhab al-salaf*) in both speech and action (*qawlan wa-fi‘lan*), which indicates that even the term *madhdhab al-salaf* by then was sometimes used with a practical component to its meaning, not only as a description of a position in creed as Lauzière claims.⁶¹ Another letter from al-Qāsimī to al-Ālūsī mentions how certain rediscovered manuscripts that deal with matters of Islamic law and ritual in the library of the al-Shaṭṭī family – a prominent family of Ḥanbalī scholars in Damascus – should be published and brought to the attention of the *salafiyyīn*.⁶² In a letter in 1909 to Muḥammad Naṣīf, al-Qāsimī mentions how their mutual friend Tāhir al-Jazā’irī (1851–1920) spoke highly to him of “the *salafiyyīn* in India,” first and foremost associating them with their service to the knowledge discipline of *ḥadīth*.⁶³ In other instances, to be a Salafi is no longer only a creedal *madhdhab* that one adheres to, but a ‘*mashrab*’: a way of carrying oneself, a general outlook on religion and life.⁶⁴ The Moroccan *ḥadīth* scholar ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī (1884–1962) addressed al-Qāsimī with the epithet *al-salafī* in his letter to him. Another letter from the Tunisian Muḥammad

60 On Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī see Hala Fattah, “‘Wahhabi’ Influences, Salafi Responses: Shaikh Mahmud Shukri and The Iraqi Salafi Movement, 1745–1930”, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14:2 (2003), 127–48; Itzhak Weismann, “Genealogies of Fundamentalism: Salafi Discourse in Nineteenth-Century Baghdad”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36:2 (2009), 267–80.

61 Admittedly, the usage of the term still remained ambiguous and it did not yet have one fixed meaning. The same letter also speaks of their friend Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥafīz (d. 1937) in Fes, whom al-Qāsimī describes as *salafī* in matters of creed and ‘scripturalist’ (*atharī*) in matters of law. al-‘Ajmī, *Rasā’il*, 113; Lauzière, *Making of Salafism*, 27–33.

62 al-‘Ajmī, *Rasā’il*, 163.

63 It is therefore likely he alluded to the Ahl-i Ḥadīth in India. al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn*, 609.

64 al-‘Ajmī, *Rasā’il*, 127, 174.

al-Bashīr al-Nayfar (1889–1974) also addresses him as “the *salafī* scholar”, and the epithet shows up in other letters as well, seldom explicitly alluding to matters of creed.⁶⁵

None of the abovementioned constitutes indisputable evidence for an unequivocal usage of the term for more than an approach to creedal matters; for that, the cases where it does specifically refer to an approach to creedal matters are too numerous to cite. However, the term's usage is subject to further interpretation, and there is enough material to reasonably doubt recent claims that the term *salafī* only signified an approach to creed prior to the 1920s, or was not used as an epithet at all.⁶⁶

From al-Qāsimī to Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr

al-Qāsimī's treatise on wiping over socks came to bear vividly amongst later Salafī circles. It was first reprinted by the Salafī Publishing House (al-Maṭba'a al-Salafīyya) in 1956 in Cairo, directed by al-Qāsimī's student Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (1886–1969).⁶⁷ This publication came about through the endeavors

65 al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn*, 566, 573, 586, 588, 608–09, 622.

66 See Lauzière, *Making of Salafism*, 27–33.

67 This is not the place to delve deeply into the discussion about the story behind the naming of this publishing house, as discussed by Lauzière. However, a few short words are in its place. Given al-Khaṭīb's multiple connections to the self-proclaimed Salafis of Damascus and their understanding of the term being broader than only creed, it is likely that the use of this epithet for his book store and publishing house has more significance than Lauzière concedes. In al-Khaṭīb's articles in his journal *al-Zahrā'* from the 1920s, this epithet was only reserved for his former Damascene mentor Ṭāhir al-Jazā'irī, who prompted al-Khaṭīb to name his publishing house and book store with the epithet. According to Lauzière, the reason was that “al-Jazā'irī had such esteem for the doctrine of the forefathers and was so devoted to its revival”. Given the negligible role creedal matters played in the multifaceted, intellectual activism of al-Jazā'irī, this seems to be a misinterpretation. Only one work explicitly on creedal matters is known from the hand of al-Jazā'irī: *al-Jawāhir al-kalāmīyya*. This is a basic text for instruction of young students that cannot be explicitly characterized as promoting “the doctrine of the forefathers”. The private notebooks (*kunash*) of al-Jazā'irī show that he was interested in a lot of topics, with matters of creed only a negligible part of his intellectual endeavors. al-Khaṭīb's naming of his publishing house and book store must have been intended in its broader meaning, as was already current in the reform-oriented circles of Damascus from the late nineteenth century onwards, which reflects the much broader intellectual interest of al-Jazā'irī. This needs further scrutiny elsewhere. A deeper analysis of al-Khaṭīb's journal *al-Zahrā'* may offer some further clues to developments in the meaning of *salafī* in the 1920s. Ṭāhir al-Jazā'irī, *al-Jawāhir al-kalāmīyya fī idāh al-'aqida al-islāmīyya*, ed. Ḥasan al-Hādī Ḥusayn (Cairo: Dār al-Uṣūr, n.d.); idem, *Tadhkirat Ṭāhir al-Jazā'irī*, ed. Muḥammad Khayr Ramaḍān Yūsuf, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2012); Lauzière, *Making of Salafism*, 42.

of Muḥammad Naṣīf, al-Qāsimī's interlocutor from Jeddah.⁶⁸ The edition of the Syrian Salafi publishing house al-Maktab al-Islāmī, edited by Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, was first printed in 1971, followed by four new editions.⁶⁹

Naṣīf asked Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir to write a foreword to the edition of al-Maṭba'a al-Salafiyya. Shākir was a judge and a scholar trained at al-Azhar and descending from a prominent family of scholars. He was an important figure in Muslim circles in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century, including Salafis. The importance of his life and legacy seems to be unjustly overlooked in European languages, in stark contrast with his perceived importance in Arabic-language scholarship.⁷⁰ Shākir was responsible for many modern print editions of premodern works that would become classics in and beyond Salafi circles, like the Qur'an commentaries of Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Ismā'īl b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), the *ḥadīth* collections of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Tirmidhī and Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/988), al-Shāfi'ī's *al-Risāla* and Ibn Ḥazm's *al-Muḥallā*.⁷¹ He was also a regular contributor to Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb's journal *al-Zahrā'* with articles on Arabic literature and Islamic matters. The young Shākir was an avid student of al-Qāsimī during the latter's spell in Cairo between 1903 and 1904. In his own words, he was particularly impressed by al-Qāsimī as a pioneer in the study and the appreciation of the works and methods of the earliest generations of Islamic scholars (*salaf*).⁷² He held a written license to transmit from al-Qāsimī (*ijāza*), which he requested from him by mail.⁷³ Hence, it is no surprise that

68 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *al-Maṣḥ 'alā al-jawrabayn: yalihi kitāb al-isti'nās li-taṣḥīḥ ankiḥat al-nās*, ed. Muḥammad Naṣīf (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Salafiyya, 1956).

69 Ibid. It was reprinted in 1977, 1979, 1983 and 1986. For this article I relied on the 5th edition, from 1986.

70 See Gualtherus H. A. Juynboll, "Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (1892–1958) and his edition of Ibn Ḥanbal's Musnad", *Der Islam* 49 (1972), 221–47; Ebrahim Moosa, "Shaykh Aḥmad Shākir and the Adoption of a Scientifically-Based Lunar Calendar", *ILS* 51 (1998), 57–89; Ron Shaham, "An Egyptian Judge in a Period of Change: Qāḍī Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, 1892–1958", *JAOS* 119:3 (1999), 440–55; Ayoub, "Casting Off Egyptian Ḥanafism"; El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 86–87, 217, 229–34. For Arabic studies on Shākir, his family of scholars and their legacy, see Usāma Aḥmad Shākir, *Min a'lām al-'aṣr: al-shaykh Muḥammad Shākir, Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir* (Cairo, 2001); Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, *Jamharat maqālāt Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir ma'a aḥamm ta'aqqubāt al-shaykh 'alā dā'irat al-ma'ārif al-islāmīyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Ḥammād al-'Aql, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-Riyāḍ, 2005); Mutawalli al-Barājili, *Ma'ālim minhaj al-shaykh Aḥmad Shākir fī naqd al-ḥadīth* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 2013).

71 al-Qāsimī, *Riḥlati ilā al-Madīna*, 89–92. See also El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 86–87, 217, 229–34.

72 Shākir mentions this in his foreword; al-Qāsimī, *al-Maṣḥ*, 3–4.

73 For the full text of the *ijāza* that Shākir received from al-Qāsimī see al-Qāsimī, *Riḥlati ilā al-Madīna*, 93–96.

Shākir is generally characterized as someone with Salafi leanings and as sympathetic to the project of reviving the practice of *ijtihād*.⁷⁴

Can his foreword to the reprint of al-Qāsimī's treatise contribute anything to the interpretation of the legacy of Shākir? In it, Shākir is full of praise for the treatise of al-Qāsimī, and reminisces on how it impressed him as a young student when it was first published in 1914:

longing for sound knowledge, knowledge of the Qur'an and the Sunna. We were as eager as one can be for the books of the virtuous earlier generations (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) and the books of those who followed their approach (*nahaja manhajahum*) from the later generations, who cling to prophetic guidance and follow sound proof (*al-dalil al-ṣaḥiḥ*), without fanaticism for a specific opinion or desire, and without being stiff on [the way of] emulation (*taqlid*).⁷⁵

To those familiar with contemporary 'puritan' Salafi rhetoric and jargon, these phrases sound very familiar; they are clearly rooted in an older tradition from – at least – the first half of the twentieth century. Shākir mentions how he considers al-Qāsimī to belong to the vanguard of this "upright approach" (*al-nahj al-qawīm*), and how fortunate he considers himself to have had the chance to study under him during al-Qāsimī's stay in Egypt. When Shākir's friend Muḥammad Naṣīf – as mentioned before, also a friend of al-Qāsimī and al-Jazā'irī – asked him to write a foreword to a new edition of the treatise, he decided to have another look at the *ḥadīth* material that al-Qāsimī had compiled, and to add some other narrations thereto that were not available to al-Qāsimī.

In the remainder of his foreword, Shākir once more confirms al-Qāsimī's view that the three crucial narrations attributed to the Prophet on which al-Qāsimī built his argument (al-Thawbān, al-Mughīra, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī) have been erroneously labeled weak by *ḥadīth* scholars. Shākir adds an overview of the *ḥadīth* compilations in which they can be found, with the volume and page numbers of modern editions – often, his own. He also adds a fourth tradition, attributed to Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/712), which he considers to be further evidence of the legitimacy of the practice of wiping over socks. Concerning

74 However, it is also argued that "Shākir's legacy is complex, and his positions are hard to categorize or confine to a single orientation or motivation". It is too easy to simply categorize him as a 'Salafi,' it is claimed; one should consider him rather as an iconoclastic Ḥanafī. Ayoub, "Casting Off Egyptian Ḥanafism", 10–11.

75 al-Qāsimī, *al-Maṣḥ*, 3.

the first *ḥadīth*, attributed to al-Thawbān, Shākir adds to al-Qāsimī's argument that its chain of transmission should not be considered interrupted (*munqaṭiʿ*). al-Qāsimī argued against this by stating that the methodology applied could have been more lenient. Shākir contends that, even according to the strictest standards, its chain of transmission should be considered connected (*mut-taṣīl*). Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal classified the said *ḥadīth* as interrupted (*munqaṭiʿ*), because he mistakenly believed that two of the transmitters did not hear narrations from one another. Shākir points out that none other than al-Bukhārī, in his *al-Taʾrīkh al-kabīr*, claimed that they did in fact do so. This suffices for Shākir as evidence that the chain of transmission should not be considered interrupted. Thus, he considers it unnecessary to lower the bars of strictness in *ḥadīth* criticism as al-Qāsimī suggested.⁷⁶

On the second *ḥadīth*, attributed to al-Mughīra b. Shuʿba, Shākir mentions several authorities who indeed considered the prophetic narration sound. He adds that the scholars who considered the *ḥadīth* as weak (*ḍaʿīf*) did so because the tradition was supposedly in contradiction (*mukhālafa*) with another one, which claims that al-Mughīra referred not to porous socks (*jawrabayn*) but to socks of impenetrable material (*khuffayn*). Shākir explains that this form of contradiction should not lead to its rejection. He builds his argument on a passage by Ibn al-Qayyim – who still considered it to be weak – which maintains that it can be traced back to no less than thirteen Companions. Ibn al-Qayyim considers the other narration to be an explanatory addition (*ziyāda*), which further confirms the tradition already found to be reliable. Shākir approvingly quotes Ibn al-Qayyim on the unfairness of those rejecting it for this reason; such an explanatory addition surely would not disturb them if the *ḥadīth* was supporting one of their positions. Ibn al-Qayyim points out how Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal would still act upon it, even though he considered the *ḥadīth* weak, as the transmitted practice of other Companions was still sufficient for supporting the practice. That is what methodological fairness requires. Shākir further adds that he does not agree with Ibn al-Qayyim in his judgment that it is weak. Shākir holds that the two traditions do not contradict one another at all, but probably refer to separate instances in the five years al-Mughīra spent with the Prophet, in which he witnessed the Prophet doing different things. If scholars accept such different prophetic reports in the rare case of the eclipse prayer (*ṣalāt al-kusūf*), Shākir argues, then why not accept them in the case of ritual ablutions, which the Prophet performed several times each day?⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid., 5–6.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 6–11.

In his discussion of the third narration, Shākir once again refers to the ultimate authority of al-Bukhārī as the strictest *ḥadīth* critic. He points out that when al-Bukhārī mentioned the *ḥadīth* in *al-Ta'rikh al-kabīr*, he remained silent regarding its classification, and did not point out a weakness in the *ḥadīth*'s chain of transmission. His silence on the matter can only mean that he considered it as acceptable at least.⁷⁸ Shākir then adds a fourth narration that al-Qāsimī was not aware of, which Shākir considers to be sound in its chain and straightforward in its wording. In it, the Companion Anas b. Mālik wipes over socks made of wool. When asked about this practice, Anas refers to them as woolen *khuffayn*, a term that usually specifically signifies shoes. Shākir explains that this tradition should be classified as 'halted' (*mawqūf*) at Anas b. Mālik, in both speech and action. Shākir stresses that Anas was a specialist in matters of language. The opinion of a Companion with a strong chain of transmission on a matter of language is the strongest possible, he holds, making the baseless opinions of later linguists obsolete. Therefore, the statement of Anas should be used to reinterpret the other narrations on the subject. Apparently, he claims, *khuffayn* took on a broader meaning among the Companions than only shoes. Thus, one does not even need to apply analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) to legitimize the practice, as Ibn al-Qayyim and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal did.⁷⁹

What can we conclude from this discussion by Shākir? In al-Qāsimī's case, it could be argued that he deliberately propagated a less strict method out of utilitarian considerations. Shākir, however, no longer deemed such an approach necessary. In his foreword, he wanted to show that, even when applying the strictest methods of *ḥadīth* criticism, one can still conclude that the narrations on wiping over socks are sound. Earlier scholars, according to Shākir, made mistakes concerning both their classification and their consequences for their legal reasoning on the subject. Therefore, Shākir's reasoning amounts to fundamental criticism on the inconsistent – perhaps even opportunistic – application of *ḥadīth* criticism and *uṣūl al-fiqh* by postclassical *madhhab* – scholars. The initial utilitarian approach of al-Qāsimī has brought about a dialectic towards a strict puritan approach here.

Shākir could only make this argument due to the spectacular rise of Islamic print culture during his age. He had much more sources available to him for comparison than al-Qāsimī, as well as a more intimate knowledge of these sources due to his efforts in editing them for the new Islamic publishing

⁷⁸ Ibid., 11–12.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 12–15.

industry.⁸⁰ He exactly did what al-Qāsimī propagated in his treatise, to wit, that the scholar should be allowed to directly consult the meticulously preserved *ḥadīth* compilations, even if one has not completely read them with a full *isnād* for an *ijāza*. The sources were now all available for Shākir as never before in Islamic history. Thus, Shākir inherited al-Qāsimī's *ijtihād*-based methodological iconoclasm in both *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*, but further improved upon it, thanks to his superior knowledge of the relevant sources. Still, methodologically he took al-Qāsimī as an example – even admired him – and considered this to be the correct approach in following the way of the *salaf*.

From Shākir to al-Albānī

Studies on Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī repeatedly state that he never received formal training in *ḥadīth* studies, never earned any license (*ijāza*) to transmit or teach the knowledge discipline, and taught the discipline to himself by spending long solitary hours in the library.⁸¹ His turn to a distinct Salafī method in his younger years – as he himself claims – was very much inspired by the work of al-Qāsimī's companion Rashīd Riḍā.⁸² However, a direct lineage through scholar-student connections from al-Qāsimī to al-Albānī, who was born in the year that al-Qāsimī passed away, cannot be established. But upon taking a closer look at al-Albānī's social milieu during his formative years in Damascus, a certain continuity in social relations from al-Qāsimī to al-Albānī can be observed. As visualized in Figure 1 below, al-Qāsimī's students Muḥammad Bahjat al-Biṭār (1893–1976) and Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb are the most important links between the two scholars.⁸³ For twenty-five years, al-Albānī was a regular

80 On the role of Shākir in this new publishing industry see El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, Ch. 8.

81 This is also a main point of criticism on al-Albānī from his adversaries. See Kamaruddin Amin, "Nāṣiruddin al-Albānī on Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*: A Critical Study of His Method", *ILS* 11:2 (2004), 149; Jonathan A.C. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 321–25; Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 106–07, 115–17; Emad Hamdeh, "The Formative Years of an Iconoclastic Salafī Scholar", *MW* 106:3 (2016), 411–13; Olidort, "In Defense of Tradition", 2.

82 See Hamdeh, "Formative Years", 420; Olidort, "In Defense of Tradition", 52ff.

83 On al-Biṭār see Itzchack Weismann and Rokaya Adawi, "Muḥammad Bahjat al-Biṭār and the Decline of Modernist Salafism in Twentieth-Century Syria", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 32:2 (2021), 237–56.

contributor to the reform-oriented journal *Majallat al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī*, in which he published his first article in 1952.⁸⁴ This was the official journal of the Islamic Civilization Society (Jam'īyyat al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī), established in 1932, with some of al-Qāsimī's former students as prominent members and contributors.⁸⁵ This reform-oriented society was not strictly Salafi and also maintained good relations with the non-Salafi conservative scholars in Damascus. The society's journal was an important podium for al-Albānī – as a result of its openness to different ideas – who struggled to find an institutional embedding for his iconoclastic methodology. al-Albānī also frequented the study circles of society-member Muḥammad Bahjat al-Biṭār. This was one of the most prominent students of al-Qāsimī and Rashīd Riḍā, the grandson of al-Qāsimī's close companion and *eminence grise* of the Damascene Salafi trend 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Biṭār (1834–1916), as well as the editor of the first edition of al-Qāsimī's *Qawā'id al-taḥdīth* in 1925.⁸⁶

Another indication that this society served as a link in the genealogical lines between al-Qāsimī and al-Albānī are Maḥmūd Maḥdī al-Istānbūlī (1909–98) and Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh (1925–2013), both close companions

84 Ahmad Mouaz al-Khatib, "al-Tamaddun al-Islami: passé et présent d'une association réformiste damascène", *Maghreb-Machrek* 198 (2008–09), 79–89; Wagemakers, "Salafism's Historical Continuity", 216.

85 The current president of this society, Mu'adh al-Khaṭīb (1960–), identifies himself with the thought of al-Qāsimī. He authored the foreword to a recent edition of personal notes of al-Qāsimī, in which al-Khaṭīb describes how his father used to teach from his Qur'an commentary in the mosque in his presence as a child. Thomas Pierret, who interviewed al-Khaṭīb on multiple occasions for his standard work on the Islamic scholars of Syria, states that al-Khaṭīb considers himself a representative of the thought and method of al-Qāsimī. al-Khaṭīb considers his own Salafi teacher 'Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā'ūt (1928–2004) the true heir of al-Qāsimī's approach in Damascus, not al-Albānī. The latter supposedly strayed from this approach due to his excessive literalism. al-Qāsimī, *Sawāniḥ*, 5–8; Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria*, 103–04, 136–38; al-Khatib, "al-Tamaddun al-Islami".

86 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-taḥdīth min funūn muṣṭalaḥ al-hadīth*, ed. Muḥammad Bahjat al-Biṭār (Damascus: Maṭba'at Ibn Zaydūn, 1353/1925); Weismann and Adawi, "Muḥammad Bahjat al-Biṭār".

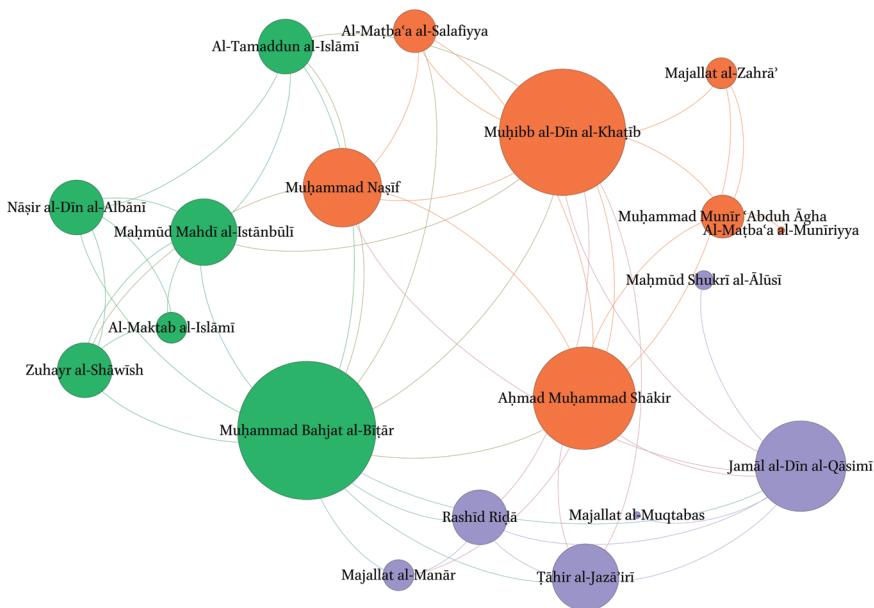


FIGURE 1 The Multiple Connections between 'Modern' and 'Puritan' Salafis.⁸⁷

of al-Albānī.⁸⁸ These two Salafi scholars were both linked to the Jam'iyyat al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī and were regular contributors to the society's journal. Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh ran the publishing house al-Maktab al-Islāmī with funding from Qatar and hired al-Albānī as an editor.⁸⁹ This publishing house published a biography of al-Qāsimī authored by al-Istānbūlī, which reads as a clear attempt to place al-Qāsimī's legacy within their ideological camp. He dedicated this work to "those who propagated religious reform (*du'āt al-iṣlāḥ*

87 This visualization was created with the Yifan Hu algorithm in Gephi, an open source program for social network visualization and analysis. The different group colors were automatically created with the 'Modularity Class' algorithm within Gephi. They signify different 'scenes' within the larger network. The size of the nodes depends on the degree of connectivity of the individual or institution to others. Bastian M., Heymann S., Jacomy M., *Gephi: an open source software for exploring and manipulating networks*, International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, 2009.

88 A recent Arabic work that critically analyzes Salafi Islam from an emic perspective mentions both of them as part of the "al-Albānī-revivalist Salafi camp" (*al-salafiyya al-ihyā'iyya al-Albāniyya*). 'Amr Basyūnī and Aḥmad Sālim, *Mā ba'd al-salafiyya: Qirā'a naqdiyya fī al-khiṭāb al-salafī al-mu'aṣir* (Beirut: Markaz Namā' li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt, 2010), 206.

89 On al-Shāwīsh, see Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria*, 107; Olidort, "In Defense of Tradition", Ch. 4; Muḥammad Nāṣir al-'Ajmī, *al-Ālim al-mu'arrikh al-shaykh Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh wa-khizānatuhu al-Shāwīshīyya* (Damascus: Dār al-Muqtabas, 2020).

al-dīnī), who lobby for a returning to the Qur'ān and the Sunna."⁹⁰ al-Istānbūlī also wrote an obituary on Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb for the society's journal. There, al-Istānbūlī praises al-Khaṭīb as

a Salafi who strived hard (*salafīyyan mujāhidan*), who helped the *Salafīyya* triumph and established a book shop and publishing house bearing the label Salafi. (...). His Salafi legacy will remain a beacon that illuminates the way of calling unto religion, reform, and renewal.⁹¹

Therefore, it is no coincidence that al-Maktab al-Islāmī decided to reissue the first 1956 reprint of al-Qāsimī's work on wiping over socks by al-Maṭba'a al-Salafīyya.⁹²

Now, let us pay some attention to the content of al-Albānī's footnotes to al-Qāsimī's text, and how he relates himself to both Shākir and al-Qāsimī in his edition. al-Albānī considered Shākir to be an important like-minded scholar on a similar mission to reestablish the importance of the knowledge discipline of *ḥadīth* as the heart of Islamic reform, as well as in editing and having a fresh critical look at the reliability of *ḥadīth* compendia.⁹³ Therefore, one of al-Albānī's favorite works to teach throughout his scholarly career was Shākir's edition of Ismā'īl b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr's *Ikhtishār 'ulūm al-ḥadīth*.⁹⁴ al-Albānī also authored an extensive commentary to this text, originally not intended for publication, but considered to be one of his greatest works by his students.⁹⁵ As also noted by Olidort about al-Albānī's edition of al-Qāsimī's treatise on innovations (*bida'*) in mosques, although al-Albānī admired al-Qāsimī and praised him as a virtuous scholar, he was certainly not afraid to be critical of certain aspects of al-Qāsimī's treatises.⁹⁶ Still, al-Albānī felt it was useful to

90 Maḥmūd Maḥdī al-Istānbūlī, *Shaykh al-Shām Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī* (Beirut/Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1985), 5, 7; Coppens, "Muḡtahids' Incident", 65–66.

91 Maḥmūd Maḥdī al-Istānbūlī, "Alā mā'idat faqīd al-islām Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb", *Majallat al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī* 37:17–20 (1390/1970), 367.

92 This particular treatise is not the only work of al-Qāsimī published by al-Maṭba'a al-Salafīyya that caught the interest of al-Albānī. al-Qāsimī's work on religious innovations (*bida'*) in mosques, first printed by al-Maṭba'a al-Salafīyya in 1922, with a foreword by Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, was also edited by al-Albānī. Like the *risāla* on wiping over socks, it was reprinted multiple times by al-Maktab al-Islāmī, with al-Albānī's extensive commentary and notes. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Islāh al-masājid min al-bida' wa-l-'awā'id*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2001).

93 Olidort, "In Defense of Tradition", 81–82.

94 Ismā'īl b. 'Umar b. Kathīr, *al-Bā'ith al-ḥathīth: Sharḥ 'ulūm al-ḥadīth*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1416/1996).

95 Olidort, "In Defense of Tradition", 82, 228–29.

96 Ibid., 79, 151–55.

relate himself to al-Qāsimī's works, and considered them worthy enough of publishing and annotating. He definitely appreciated al-Qāsimī's legacy and method beyond mere appropriation where he deemed fit, and identified himself therewith.

Where al-Qāsimī in his treatise points out how some narrations have been classified as weak by earlier scholars while they should be considered sound, the *ḥadīth* methodology of al-Albānī has rather become known for declaring narrations weak that have been considered sound for centuries.⁹⁷ Still, their methods did have something in common. Neither author criticized the traditional methods and principles of *ḥadīth* criticism in and of themselves, nor proposed any particular modern innovations in them whatsoever. They merely stated that earlier *ḥadīth* scholars had not been sufficiently consistent in applying these methods and principles. They were not above criticism and they needed constant revision. Hence, both al-Qāsimī and al-Albānī sought a revival of the consistent application of these principles, a form of *ijtihād* in the discipline of *ḥadīth*, instead of the in their eyes uncritical emulation (*taqlīd*) of the classifications of earlier *ḥadīth* scholars. Therefore, the corpus of *ḥadīth* should be reevaluated according to these traditional methods. Rulings of *fiqh* based on these wrongly classified proof texts should be reviewed.⁹⁸

In some respects, this led the two scholars to similar methodological interventions on the soundness of reports from earlier scholars that had become canonical. As al-Qāsimī had propagated in his treatise, al-Albānī as well would become known for not immediately rejecting interrupted (*munqaṭiʿ*) reports as weak. He equally considered other similar narrations or Qurʾānic verses as circumstantial evidence for the strength of the narration in such cases (the principle of *ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrihi* discussed earlier).⁹⁹ Thus, it is incorrect to state that al-Albānī was only interested in declaring narrations that were considered sound as weak, as is the dominant image of his legacy. The reverse could also certainly be said according to his method.

97 See Amin, "Nāṣiruddīn al-Albānī"; Brown, *Canonization*, 322–23.

98 Amin, "Nāṣiruddīn al-Albānī", 149–51; Olidort, "In Defense of Tradition", 237–38.

99 This is at odds with the claim of Ahmed Snobar that the main distinction in Levantine schools of *ḥadīth* criticism is between those who only focus on the chain of transmission (*ẓāhir al-isnād*) and those who take circumstantial evidence into account (*qarāʿin*). Snobar considers Shākir and al-Albānī representatives of the first school. Our discussion here shows that they in fact combined both methods. Ahmed Snobar, "Hadith Criticism in the Levant in the Twentieth Century: From *Ẓāhir al-Isnād* to *ʿIlal al-Ḥadīth*", in *Modern Ḥadīth Studies: Continued Debates and New Approaches*, ed. Belal Abu-Alabbas, Michael Dann and Christopher Melchert (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 151–53; Olidort, "In Defense of Tradition", 235.

Then, how can we explain the discrepancy between al-Qāsimī's and al-Albānī's popular images? The answer to that may be found in the purpose of their *ijtihād*. Since al-Qāsimī sought to break open the discussion on the authenticity of narrations to facilitate concrete matters in *fiqh*, he preferred to rely on less strict criteria of authenticity – as propagated by Imam Muslim – to be able to include as much legal *ḥadīth* material as possible as authentic. al-Albānī did not have this utilitarian approach at all. Rather, he opted for a stricter method that could be found among classical *ḥadīth* scholars as well. al-Albānī's strictness lies exactly in the realm in which al-Qāsimī proposed a more lenient criterion. As shown above, al-Qāsimī states that it is enough for two narrators to have lived in the same age to be connected (*muttaṣil*). For al-Albānī, when there is suspicion surrounding a narrator as being someone who tampers with chains of transmission (*mudallis*), it must be confirmed that the two narrators met in person and that one of them heard narrations from the other. Therefore, al-Albānī insists on using the term 'he heard' (*sami'a*) in the chain of transmission; a mere 'from' (*an*) does not suffice to classify the narration as sound.¹⁰⁰

Nonetheless, in the case of the available narrations on wiping over socks, al-Albānī does not disagree with either al-Qāsimī's or Shākir's classification of the narration as sound. His footnotes hardly ever go against their findings, and in most cases comprise further additions that support the case made by al-Qāsimī and Shākir for the reliability of the narrations and the permissibility of wiping over socks. He does check the chains of transmission that are allegedly interrupted (*munqaṭi'*) on the issue of tampering (*tadlīs*), but he does not see these interruptions as a reason to declare them as weak.¹⁰¹ Thus, al-Albānī places himself in the footsteps of al-Qāsimī's and Shākir's legacy. Like them, he is uninhibited from directing the arrows of his criticism at the classifications provided by the grandest scholars of Islamic history. To al-Albānī, on par with al-Qāsimī and Shākir, the verification and falsification of religious knowledge remain a continuous endeavor. This principle is at the heart of their Salafi method and the main point of continuity from al-Qāsimī, through Shākir, to al-Albānī.

Conclusion

al-Qāsimī's treatise on wiping over socks during ritual ablutions neatly shows that early twentieth-century Salafis cared deeply about reforming or

100 Amin, "Nāṣiruddīn al-Albānī," Olidort, "In Defense of Tradition", 230–31.

101 al-Qāsimī, *al-Maṣh*, 25.

correcting ‘indigenous’ matters of ritual that had no relation whatsoever to European modernity. The debate about wiping over socks did not arise as a result of a confrontation with this modernity. Thus, their method of reform was not merely motivated by the idea of material and civilizational progress, as Islamic reform is often understood. It was not limited to the realm of transactions (*mu‘āmalāt*), but also led to introspection in matters of worship (*‘ibādāt*) and a radical reevaluation of the source material. It contained an element of a genuine reevaluation of source texts, and of correcting what reform-oriented scholars like al-Qāsimī conceived to be centuries-long misunderstandings in these ritualistic matters, perpetuated by the schools of law. This radical reevaluation of source texts on ritualistic matters is what later ‘puritan’ Salafis like al-Albānī would become known for. They would take this much further, to its limits even, but found a precedent among self-proclaimed Salafis like al-Qāsimī from the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, who themselves also found precedent in earlier authors with large popular appeal, who – as far as we know – did not yet name themselves ‘Salafi’ explicitly. Accordingly, they can only be understood as a continuation – with its own accents and new dynamics – of what these earlier reform-oriented scholars started to give the label ‘Salafi’.

The issue of ritual purity discussed in al-Qāsimī’s treatise touches upon a daily practiced ritual that is a prerequisite for performing daily ritual prayers. Therefore, it formed such an apropos symbolic battle for the deeper issues on *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* method that these Salafi authors wanted to address. The methodological differences between Salafis and *madhhab*-traditionalists were thus no longer abstract philological debates, but became immediately tangible for every Muslim who cared about ritual purity. Consequently, wiping over socks during ritual ablutions made the differences in ideological allegiance of practicing Muslims visible and mobilized the common believers on a daily practice.¹⁰² Therefore, to be the most permissive side on the issue may be an advantage to attract these common believers to one’s side. al-Qāsimī was probably already aware of such impact on the common believers when he authored the treatise intending to publish it as a pamphlet-like *risāla*. One may understand the *risāla* as a case of ‘vernacular legalism’; it was aimed at a

¹⁰² The importance of mobilizing the masses for scholars is clearly visible in the *Mujtahids’* Incident. It was a tool for the imprisoned al-Qāsimī and his peers to put pressure on the governor to release al-Qāsimī and to not further persecute and punish them. See al-‘Ajmī, *Imām al-Shām fī ‘aṣrihi*, 63–95; al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn*, 48–69; Coppens, “*Muḡtahids’* Incident”, 70, 83–86.

semi-educated audience as an instrument of popular politics.¹⁰³ For al-Qāsimī, the popularizing medium of the *risāla* would be an ideal way to once more challenge the status quo of *madhhab*-bound scholars in Damascus, as he had earlier done with his *uṣūl* treatises.¹⁰⁴ For al-Albānī, wiping over socks proved similarly useful as a symbolic battle, as with other battles related to daily practices of prayer that he deliberately chose to take on.

Hence, al-Qāsimī's *risāla* serves as a reminder for historians of Salafi Islam not to underestimate discussions on ritual purity, notwithstanding how trivial they might seem.¹⁰⁵ A whole world of religious symbolism and contention can be discovered behind these issues of ritual purity. If we want to bring the study of Salafi Islam further, it is important that our scholarship not only focuses on its political aspects, as is the (explicable) dominant trend since the violent attacks on US soil of September 11, 2001.¹⁰⁶ This security frame may lead to a reductionist understanding of Salafi Islam's scholarly legacy and its influence on general Islamic discussions, only focusing on the components that constitute a political ideology, "Salafism" as proposed by Bruckmayr and Hartung.¹⁰⁷ We should also analyze minor treatises that do not directly deal with their

103 Nir Shafir, "Vernacular Legalism in the Ottoman Empire: Confession, Law, and Popular Politics in the Debate over the 'Religion of Abraham (*millet-i İbrāhīm*)'", *ILS* 28 (2021), 32–75.

104 See El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 177–79.

105 Historians of Islamic law have become well aware of the importance of studying ritual purity. Abdul-Rahman Mustafa points out how post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment thought about ritual in Europe tended to trivialize and even ridicule such matters of ritual purity. This has also influenced the study of Islam deeply, he states. By now several valuable studies have appeared on ritual and purity in Islam to significantly make up for that perceived blind spot. See Maghen, "Much Ado about *Wuḍūʿ*"; Marion H. Katz, *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002); Richard Gauvain, "Ritual Rewards: A Consideration of Three Recent Approaches to Sunni Purity Law", *ILS* 12:3. (2005), 333–93; Kevin Reinhart, "What to do with Ritual Texts: Islamic *Fiqh* Texts and the Study of Islamic Ritual", in *Islamic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Transformations and Continuities*, ed. Léon Buskens and Annemarie van Sandwijk (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 67–86; Mustafa, "Ritual and Rationality", 241–44.

106 See Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006), 207–39; Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Stephane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi-Arabia* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For criticism on this focus on politics see Said and Fouad, *Salafismus*, 23–8; Bruckmayr and Hartung, "Salafi Islam Outside the Arab World", 153.

107 Bruckmayr and Hartung, "Salafi Islam Outside the Arab World", 154.

political thought – although, indirectly, they may of course have political implications. Thus, we can understand what on a deeper level was, and still is, at stake for Salafis and their opponents in their heated discussions on minor matters of ritual. Analysis of such treatises may also help us understand and appreciate their often academically rigorous methodology better, and its continuities and changes throughout the decades. In the case of Shākir, this is all the more necessary since, as historians of Islam, we often rely on his critical editions of classical works.¹⁰⁸

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¹⁰⁸ The Damascene Salafi scholar ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā’ūt has similarly edited a significant amount of classical works that historians of Islam rely upon. As Walid Saleh remarked: “The field pretends to get its primary sources through a mysterious process, a process that is both reliable enough to permit scholars to consume its products and insignificant enough that those responsible for it are not given due credit.” Walid Saleh, “Marginalia and Peripheries: A Tunisian Historian and the History of Qur’anic Exegesis”, *Numen* 58 (2011), 294–95.

AUTHOR QUERIES

NO QUERIES